

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Autoethnographic writing is a relatively new approach to qualitatively exploring and understanding the inner and personal journeys of people in general and psychotherapists in particular. It is this method of introspection that has been used to create the personal and introspective stories that form the basis of the study undertaken in this dissertation.

My personal journey and quest to become a clinical psychologist is one which involves a seventeen-year relationship with one tertiary institution namely Unisa. During all this time I was a student determined to complete a formal qualification in clinical psychology. The six chapters of this dissertation, as well as an Appendix of primary writings (hereafter called stories) analyse, discuss and interpret that journey.

The primary aim of this study is to create and qualitatively explore the stories of my life in an autoethnographic manner. At least ninety percent of the stories were crafted over a three-month period (January to March 2003), using the processes of systematic introspection, archival exploration and writing both cognitively and emotionally. The stories were created in a spontaneous and

unstructured manner and serve as the primary writings from which I do a narrative analysis.

The formal processes which govern the training and registration of a psychotherapist in S.A. are explained in Chapter 2. It is here that the historical and political context of S.A. is sketched, thus forming a backdrop to mental health care and training in S.A. The significant aspects of psychotherapy training in S.A. are highlighted with reference to contexts of learning, developmental issues and supervision. A critical appraisal of my training and supervision experiences as encountered at Unisa is then discussed.

Chapter 3 explains the natural history of the entire research process informing this dissertation. My journey is outlined from a linear epistemology towards a non-linear epistemology, utilizing Keeney as my main source of reference. My motivation for choosing a qualitative methodological approach is described. As indicated earlier, autoethnography was employed as a tool to create and collect the data. The created data are analysed in terms of a narrative analytical method. The stories are framed in narrative form, hence my preference for narrative analysis to extract and highlight themes.

In chapter 4, I provide a contextual life story narrative. The aim of this narrative is to provide a global and macro context within which to understand and interpret the stories that are appended to this dissertation. In so doing a seventeen-year struggle and academic relationship with Unisa is highlighted, including my insatiable desire and life-long dream to become a psychologist.

Chapter 5 analyses the stories using a narrative analytical method. As a result a number of initial and inferred themes emerge from the stories. The initial themes include the following: loss, quest for education, determination, finding meaning despite suffering and silence. The inferred themes are: belonging, separateness, aloneness, change and fragmentation.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by highlighting the results of the study as well as the benefits and limitations of an autoethnographic approach. Recommendations as well as suggestions for future research are based on the outcome of the analysis and interpretation of the stories.

An Appendix containing thirteen stories has been provided. Here the reader is given direct access to the 'raw' data that were produced for the purposes of this study. I created a total of thirty four stories. Of these, only thirteen are pertinent to the purpose of this dissertation, and they have been included in the Appendix, pp.150-252.

I have decided to exclude some of the stories, because they are too personal and too revealing while other stories may offend some of the people in the stories. There are also some stories that are of such a sensitive nature that I would need to get special permission from all the implicated parties, before making them publicly available.

To facilitate easy reading and connectivity the stories are as far as possible arranged in the order in which the events happened in my life. In other words the stories follow a linear calendar approach (i.e. from my birth to the present day). Where appropriate, I have provided explanatory notes to provide additional contextual information which is necessary for understanding the story. This additional information is indicated by using a different typeface namely, *italics*, to distinguish between the 'original' story and the 'elaborated' version. I have not edited the stories in any way except for grammar and syntax purposes. The stories are presented here in their original and 'raw' format. Some of the stories are incomplete and may need a much more extensive commentary in order to provide the reader with a complete picture. However, for the purposes of this dissertation the brief commentaries provided for some of the stories are deemed sufficient.

My seventeen-year struggle to become a psychotherapist has taken place within the context of a changing mental health profession in S.A. In 1985, when I started my journey, the health care profession was still deeply embedded in and bedeviled by the absurdity of Apartheid and its racially based health care system and training process. My formal clinical master's training under the auspices of Unisa has taken place in a post-Apartheid environment.

There is no doubt that the legacy of Apartheid will live on for many years to come. However, it is significant that my journey has uniquely straddled both the Apartheid and post-Apartheid periods. It is this context of formal

psychotherapy training and its requirements that will be discussed in the next chapter.